

SPEECH

16.

OF

HON. WILLIAM E. SIMMS,
OF KENTUCKY,

ON THE

ORGANIZATION OF THE HOUSE, AND THE AGGRESSIONS OF
THE ANTI-SLAVERY PARTY OF THE NORTH;

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DECEMBER 16, 1859.

WASHINGTON:

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SPEECH.

The following resolution, submitted by Mr. CLARK, of Missouri, being under consideration—

Whereas, certain members of this House, now in nomination for Speaker, did indorse and recommend the book hereinafter mentioned,

Resolved, That the doctrines and sentiments of a certain book, called "The Impending Crisis of the South—How to meet it," purporting to have been written by one Hinton R. Helper, are insurrectionary and hostile to the domestic peace and tranquillity of the country, and that no member of this House who has indorsed and recommended it, or the compend from it, is fit to be Speaker of this House,"

Mr. SIMMS said:

Mr. CLERK: The subject-matter of this discussion is not new to the country. The recent invasion of the territory of a sister State, by an armed band of murderers and traitors, marks but another step in the progress of this northern crusade of fanaticism against the rights and property of fifteen of the sovereign States of this Confederacy. It was nothing more nor less than the logical result of the principles and doctrines advocated and maintained upon this floor, in the Senate Chamber, upon the stump, from the press and pulpit, of the Republican or anti-slavery party of the northern States. I shall endeavor to speak plainly and frankly upon this subject, representing, as I do, a frank and manly constituency, who seek no concealment of their opinions and feelings upon any of the public questions of the day. The district I have the honor to represent needs no public pledge here of its loyalty and devotion to the Constitution and the Union of these States. For more than thirty years upon this floor, and in the Senate Chamber, Kentucky's most gifted son, the great commoner, stood forth the bravest champion of the Federal Union, the strongest pillar beneath the arch of the Republic. In my judgment, it becomes us to meet this question in a spirit of frankness. It is time we should understand each other. Upon this question of slavery there has always been a diseased public sentiment in the northern States. This diseased public sentiment, presenting itself first in one form of attack, and then another, has all the time trailed as a serpent in the track of the Republic, seeking to poison the fountains of its existence.

First, in the form of petitions for the restriction of the inter-slave trade between the States; then, sir, for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia; then it demanded the intervention of the Federal Government, by a solemn act of Congress, to exclude slavery from every inch of the territory belonging to the United States north of the Missouri line, as it has been termed; and now, sir, declares that whether Congress intervenes or not to exclude slavery from the Territories, another slave State shall never be admitted into the Federal Union.

In addition to this, the Republican party, now numbering more than one hundred members upon this floor, by their speeches in Congress, by their legislative resolves, by their State conventions, by their public orators, their press and pulpit in the northern States, and, too, by armed resistance, have sought to nullify the fugitive slave act, and to destroy the moral power of the Supreme Court of the United States as a court of last resort, by bringing its decision into public contempt, because it decided in the Dred Scott case that Congress has no power under the Constitution to exclude slavery from any of the Territories now belonging to the General Government.

There are now fifteen slave States with a representation in the Senate of thirty members, while there are eighteen free States with a representation of thirty-six members in the Senate. The balance of power in the Senate of the United States, once deemed the safeguard of the South, has been lost. This preponderance of popular and legislative power in favor of the free States must soon be increased by the admission of other new States. With this preponderance of popular and legislative power in favor of the North, there is nothing now left between the South and her assailants, except the Democratic party of the northern States and the Constitution of the Federal Union as expounded by the Supreme Court. The Abolition or anti-slavery party of the free States having failed, up to this moment, to reach the institution of slavery in the southern States where it exists by direct legislation, have sought its overthrow indirectly, by poisoning the public

mind of the northern people upon this subject, and by keeping up a constant war of theft and plunder upon our borders. To accomplish this, they have scattered their incendiary documents throughout the length and breadth of the land. They have elevated to high places of public trust in the councils of the nation men who declare "there is an irrepressible conflict between slave and free labor;" that the Constitution uniting the two "is a covenant with *death*, and an agreement with *hell*, and that they will agitate this question while a single slave remains upon the soil of America." The logical result of all these attacks upon the institutions of the South was the recent foray of John Brown and his clansmen upon the soil of Virginia. I shall not now repeat here the result of that attack, but will pause to inquire whether or not the southern States have any rights in this Federal Union; and, if they have, is it not now high time that some stand be taken upon this subject, beyond which northern aggression shall not go?

I am no disunionist. I should regard its necessity as a terrible event. The very soil upon which I was born, the very spot where I caught my first breath of life, being almost in sight of the home of the Sage of Ashland, where he lived, and where to-day repose his honored dust, make such a thought one of terrible import to me.

But, sir, is there to be no limit to the wrongs heaped upon us by northern madmen? Are we to bow our necks to the yoke, and, like a conquered province, be despoiled of our property; and when we raise our voice of protest against these wrongs, are we to be met upon this floor and appeased by the real authors of all these wrongs, with the plea that they, in person, did not place arms in the hands of our slaves for murder and rapine? Sir, such a plea can avail us nothing. It will not protect our fire-sides from the murderous assaults, nor save our property from the grasp of the northern thief that lurks upon our borders. If this Union is to be preserved, there must be a cessation of these wrongs upon us. It will be useless for us to seek an evasion of this question. It is upon us, in all its terrible aspects. We have remonstrated; we have temporized; we have compromised; yet these have been of no avail. Shall we repeat these expedients again? Every inch we yield is claimed as a right. The Missouri restriction, that struck down at one fell blow all our rights in that vast region north of that line, large enough to make nine States equal in size to the State of New York, was wrested from us by the power of northern votes in this Hall, and in direct violation of the Constitution itself. Is this even-handed justice? and to protest against this wrong, is that agitation? If so, then, I am an agitator.

Let us examine this question, and see how the matter stands in history and right. Your fathers, sir, and mine, after having achieved their independence at the cannon's mouth, met together in solemn convention, to secure for themselves and their children after them the blessings of a free, enlightened, constitutional Government. The result of these, their first deliberations, was the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. The object of this Constitution was, to form among

the States a bond of union for the general good; not for the advancement of one section of the country, or the oppression of the other, but to make us a united people, one and indivisible forever. It was formed of confederated States, sovereign and equal, with unlimited rights over all subjects of legislation, except those expressly abridged in the Federal compact. Our fathers signed this bond, as did yours. We have performed our part of the covenant, and we now demand that you perform yours.

When this covenant was formed, twelve of the then thirteen colonies were slave States; local laws were in force in all of them for its protection. It was a part and parcel of their social and political system, and, indeed, a part of American civilization, and formed one of the very foundation stones upon which the fabric of the Union was built. You had the right to sell your slaves into the southern States, and you did it; we had the right to retain our slaves and buy yours, and we did it. You took the money for which you sold your slaves to us, and invested it in lands, houses, mechanism, and commerce. You now live in those houses and upon those lands for which you sold your slaves to us of the South. You make profit of your commerce and mechanism, and now turn round and abuse us because we retain the slaves your fathers sold us. This you do under the vaunted pretense of religious humanity. When before, in the history of the world, was there ever such villainous religion and humanity as this? If slavery be so detestable to you, why do you not disgorge the ill-gotten treasure, upon which you now live and fatten, acquired by the traffic of your fathers in human flesh? No, sir; if the disgorgement of this ill-gotten treasure would strike the shackle from every slave upon the continent; ay, sir, would even close the gates of torment itself against the frenzied, ranting, hypocritical fanatic of the North, he would take the chances of cheating the devil out of his rights, and the slave might wear his chain forever.

But, sir, is this all? Was slavery, by your fathers, who, with ours, fought the battles of the Revolution, deemed a blighting, withering curse—a sin before heaven and earth? And to hold a slave, then, was that sufficient cause to exclude a Christian master from the sacrament of the Lord's table in a northern church? No, sir. Northern sentiment then upon that subject, in the hearts of those who fought the battles of the Revolution, was not what northern sentiment is now. It was your fathers, not mine, who stood up in the national convention that framed the Constitution, and demanded that a clause be inserted in that instrument, denying to Congress the power to restrict the slave trade then existing between the colonies and foreign States before the year 1808. This clause was inserted, and so anxious were they upon the subject, that they insisted that another clause should be placed in the Constitution, declaring that Congress, the States, or the whole people of all the States, might, in the manner provided, alter or amend any other clause in the Constitution, at any time, except the clause keeping open the slave trade until the year 1808. But, sir, this

clause was to be sacred, binding, and unalterable. Unlike every other clause, it was placed above the power of the people, of Congress, and all the States. And why, sir? Because it gave to the slave merchants of Massachusetts and other northern States, a monopoly in the negro traffic. Out of this traffic they made millions of dollars. They invaded the coast of Africa, flooded the South with slaves to the very last hour of this constitutional limitation, and then, when they could no longer import and sell, turned philanthropists, insisting that all men were born free and equal, and that the slave owner, in that world to come, is doomed to that awful place "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

When it was in their power to realize profit by the sale of slaves, as you sell a horse or dog, the ring of the cash was dearer to the heart of northern avarice, than the clank of the bondman's chain was stinging to the conscience. When they could no longer import and sell, the ghost of slavery rose up before them. In every passing breeze wafted from the South, they could hear the moan of the bondmen in chains—but they kept the cash. This, sir, has been, I believe, one of the peculiar characteristics of the northern conscience and fanaticism, both in religion and politics. Anything is right either in the one or the other, that has the solid qualities at the bottom. This trade, as I have stated, your fathers kept up to the last hour allowed by the laws of the country. It was to them a monopoly, and out of the profits of this traffic they laid the foundation of that magnificent wealth now centering in the commercial emporiums of the northern States, and established that mighty commercial marine that to-day encircles the globe in its traffic. Now they turn round, upbraid the South who has given shelter and protection to the unfortunate victims of northern avarice; and with hands uplifted in the very churches built by their fathers out of the proceeds of slaves sold into the southern States, invoke the vengeance of God (and I speak it with reverence) upon the head of the slaveholder, as one outlawed before heaven and earth. You have deceived your deluded followers upon this subject. Do you also expect to deceive God? No, sir. That All-seeing eye will look into that heart of deceit, and the rotten mask that now conceals it will be torn away, and its selfishness and corruption will stand revealed before all the universe. The northern fanatic is not the first hypocrite who ever prayed upon the house top.

I sincerely hope he may escape the doom of his only prototype in that "*Book of books*;" but I do say, that if there be a place in that burning lake, where hissing serpents and fiery dragons torment the damned, hotter and more terrible than all the rest, it should be reserved for the hypocritical fanatic who would scatter the seeds of sectionalism, rouse the passions of hate, array friend against friend and brother against brother, and with the torch of the incendiary in one hand and the dagger of the assassin in the other, fire the Capitol of the Republic, and, amid its fallen columns and crumbling ruins, strike with the other the first blow that must lead to its dismemberment forever.

But, sir, I have digressed somewhat from the main purpose of my remarks this evening. I am not here to indulge in crimination or recrimination. The proud, manly, and loyal constituency I have the honor to represent upon this floor would feel degraded were I, as their Representative, to stoop to discuss the tenure by which we hold our slave property. It is enough for you to know that we hold it by a title which northern fanaticism cannot destroy. In your madness you may dissolve the Federal Union, overthrow the Republic, and raze the very foundation rock of the Capitol where we now stand, still the slave of the South will wear his chain. We are prepared to meet you in this Hall as our peers, our brothers, while you observe the Federal compact and abstain from all interference with our domestic rights. When you seek to violate these, we are prepared and determined to meet you at the cannon's mouth.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania, [Mr. HICKMAN,] the other day gave us the first lesson in a maintenance of this Union by force, by numerical power; not at the ballot-box, but at the point of the bayonet. They have, he says, eighteen million people in the free States, and that we have but eight million in the slave States; that these eighteen million can always cope with the eight million in the South; that he has never seen a northern man yet scared about the dissolution of the Union; that they are not to be deterred from their purpose of unalterable hostility to slavery by any such threats, and that they do not intend for any causes to suffer a dissolution of the Union. I answer the gentleman by saying, that in all the history of the world a brave and manly people have never submitted to oppression and wrong because of the strength and power of the assailant. This is the first time in the history of this country we have learned that this Union of the States is to be held together by force. I have always understood that patriotism, swelling up from the great public heart, bound it together as with hooks of steel. I tell the gentleman here, that his threats, and the threats of the millions he undertakes to speak for, are no terrors to the freemen of the South. I tell him, and his minions of the same faith and creed, when they shall have overrode the Constitution of the country, and seek to deliver over the South, bound hand and foot, a bleeding victim at the mere behest of northern power, shorn of our just rights under that Constitution, and to accomplish their purpose shall seek an invasion of our territory, there is not a son of my gallant old State who will not meet him upon the beach, and grappling in the death-struggle, if he fall, make his very body a bulwark between our sacred soil and her foes. This threat, sir, passes us as the idle wind; it can intimidate no one.

If every feeling of fraternity has died in the North; if fanaticism is to rule your councils; if a predatory war of theft and murder is to be kept up on our borders; if we are in future to be as we have been in times past, robbed annually of \$300,000 worth of our slave property along the line of the border States; if we are still to be abused and denounced by your public press, and from your pulpit; if we are to have no religious fellow-

ship with you; if you are to continue to send emissaries in our midst as teachers and preachers, who ask hospitality at our doors, and when we sleep rise at the hour of midnight, enter the quarters of our slaves, and with fire and sword arm them for murder and rapine; if at all hazards and regardless of all consequences you are determined to press on this irrepressible conflict between the northern and slave States—I warn you now, that you will do it at the cost of the Union itself. We have submitted to your wrongs for the sake of peace.

We have been, and are now, devotedly attached to the Union of these States; and even now, when smarting under the accumulated wrongs heaped upon us by northern madmen, there is not a heart in my district that would not bleed to hear the knell of the Federal Union. It is the work of your fathers and mine. It is the shibboleth of our power, the castle of our strength. It has given us a name and fame among the nations of the earth. The Constitution that formed it we still revere; but if you demand of us, as the price of the Union, that we surrender our \$2,000,000,000 worth of slave property or submit to a predatory war upon our borders, of plunder, arson, and murder then we say to you, the price will not be paid. We are for the Union with the Constitution. Without it, sir, and fulfillment on your part of its obligations, it is worthless to us.

For forty years, by virtue of common confederated rights, you have come into our territory, abducted our slaves, and robbed us of millions upon millions worth of our property. Had any foreign Power thus assailed us, would the manly and brave arm of the son of the South not be been upraised in her defense? Would her indignation thus long have slumbered? No, sir! If in the contest an ocean of blood had been shed; if famine and pestilence had walked abroad in the land, and every door post had been draped in mourning for the slain upon the battle-field, that arm would have been upraised. Yet for the sake of the Union, for the sake of fraternity, in memory of the past, in hope for the future, we have submitted to these wrongs. Do you desire the Union only as it may avail you to invade our rights? Do you prefer a continuation of your wrongs upon us to a maintenance of the Union? Take your choice of the alternatives.

Sir, I have been taught to reverence the Constitution of my country, not as a mere thing on paper, but as the life-giving, vital principle of the Government itself. There is no power in the mere paper upon which it is written. Its power must spring from a common interest, a common destiny, coexisting and fixed in the hearts of the masses. Does any such power now exist in a common sentiment between the North and the South, religiously, socially, or politically? Who have severed these heart-strings of the Federal Union? You have carried this question into some of your northern churches, and to-day a slaveholder from the South is denied communion in those churches at the table of the Lord's supper. Have the North and South a common political sentiment, or social affinities? Sir, destroy the Democratic party in the North, destroy the last

link that binds together the sections, and who can judge of the consequences of that event?

I will not endeavor to lift the veil in advance. Heaven forbid that I may live to see the day when this mighty Union, this glorious country of ours, now presenting to the world the proudest monument of human liberty ever vouchsafed to man, shall stand forth dismembered, shattered, torn, and bleeding, the hiss of tyrants and the wonder of fools.

And now, sir, when gentlemen from the North hear the very heart-strings of the Union break, one by one, do they expect to unite its broken cords, and give life and health to the great body politic, by elevating to that chair, only three degrees removed from the Presidency, a man who indorsed and recommended an incendiary work, written and published for the express purpose of inciting rebellion and murder throughout the entire southern States. The gentleman says he signed and recommended the book without having read it. Does this make his offense less? Has he disclaimed, upon this floor, the doctrines contained in that book? No, sir; upon this subject he has maintained a defiant silence. He will not be interrogated. He has no favors to ask of this side of the House. That is his answer.

Had John Brown and his clan been successful in their attack upon the soil of Virginia, in inciting slaves to rebellion; had he succeeded in placing in their hands pikes and Sharpe's rifles, and when the morning dawned upon the mother of States and statesmen, on that fatal day the whole South had been lit up in flames, and its very rivers swollen with the blood of its citizens, charred, butchered, and plundered while they slept, would the gentleman from Ohio be permitted to stand here to-day and say he had not read the book (Helper's book) when he signed and indorsed it? Would such an answer be deemed satisfactory? Would it wake from the cold slumbers of death the ill-starred victims of his rashness? That John Brown did not succeed, was it any fault of his? He had the power of his influence and name. No, sir; we want no more subterfuges upon this subject. We want no more treason proclaimed upon the floor of Congress, upon the highways and byways of the northern States, from the stump, from the pulpit and press, and then, when the overt act is done, a cowardly cringing from the responsibility. The uplifted hand, the pious prayer, the long-drawn groan of the treasonable hypocrite, cannot sanctify his deed of blood.

The South stands, in this contest, where she has always stood—in the right, and upon the Constitution of the country—and may God defend the right. She asks nothing more; she will accept not one tithe less. We have never sought to invade your territory or incite agrarianism in the hearts of the vicious hordes that hang about your receptacles of vice. We have patronized your arts and sciences; we have encouraged your industry, and expended billions upon billions of dollars in your markets. For this, your return is treason to our common Government, and murder and robbery upon us. For the sake of peace, we have submitted to these wrongs upon our rights

and institutions for more than forty years. Against these wrongs we have entered ten thousand protests, that to-day, like "angels, trumpet-tongued, plead the deep damnation" of your conduct to us. The Union that was formed for our mutual protection you are seeking to make to us an engine of oppression—a cheat and snare.

Where are now all the great national statesmen of the North, whose intellects did honor to human nature, and whose deeds of patriotism upon this floor, and in the Senate Chamber, have shed imperishable luster upon our country's history. God in his providence has removed some that they might not live to this hour, when their ungrateful countrymen would hurl them from power, because they were "just." Even the State of Massachusetts, who owes more to the achievements of her great Webster, in this and the other end of the Capitol, both made classic by his unsurpassed eloquence and learning, than to any other event in her history, to-day complains that a monument erected to his memory should stand in the public grounds in the city of Boston. But his fame is safe; it is beyond the power of fanaticism and hate to destroy. He will live forever in history. His revilers, in Massachusetts, may assail his good name; but he will live when they are forgotten. In their unnatural attack upon his memory, they may acquire an immortality; but it will be an immortality like that of the incendiary who set fire to the Ephesian temple—immortal in infamy.

I repeat, who fills the places of your Webster, your Everett, your Marcy, your Dickinson, your Cass, and Stuart, some of whom in act, and all in feeling, stood forth in the dark and perilous contest of 1850, upholding the arm of the great pacificator, as did Aaron the arm of Moses, while the battle of the Union was being fought? They have been stricken down, one by one, because they sustained a national policy from their high places in the other end of the Capitol, and because their great hearts knew no North, no South, no East, no West—nothing save their whole country. In their stead you have elevated a SEWARD and KING, a BENCHAM and CHANDLER, a WILSON and SUMNER, a HARLAN, GRIMES, and TRUMBULL, advocates of an "irrepressible conflict," whose bounded vision is measured by the limits of the free States, and whose powers are exerted in the Federal councils to crush and overwhelm in ruins fifteen of the sovereign States of this Union in a war of hate, fanaticism, denunciation, and rapine, engendered by sectional feelings. The Constitution and laws, until of late, have stood between them and their purpose, and the safety of the South.

But, sir, fanaticism knows no law but hate, and heeds no counsel but madness. It has overleaped the laws and the Constitution of the country, and you have now given us the blood-stained evidence of your unalterable purpose, upon the soil of Virginia. Are these things to be endured? can they be endured? will they be endured? Never, never! Is it any answer to us, is it any earnest of safety, that you now stand forth upon this floor and say you regret this attack upon the rights and liberties of a sister State? No, sir. These regrets are not sincere; they do not reach the evil; they erect no barrier to northern madness; they will not punish the thief that lurks upon our borders, silence the agitation of the North upon this subject, or stay the midnight murderous arm uplifted for our destruction. Your promise you may keep to the ear, but you will break it to the hope. You have raised a tempest upon this subject you cannot control. It is sweeping over the land with surging tides, threatening to engulf the Republic. You now sink back appalled, protest your innocent intentions, as "though hell was not paved with these."

Another revolution you are seeking to create like that of a Danton and Robespierre. It overrode all the powers of the State, disorganized Government, trampled upon innocence and virtue, and sacrificed one million of the bravest sons of France. Not content with this, it even entered the sacred temples of religion, and, with blasphemous shouts, looked up at the very throne of Divinity, and cried, "Victory! victory!" It will overwhelm you, as it did them. Against all this, as a Representative of a loyal, Union-loving, law-abiding people, I raise my voice of solemn protest. It may avail nothing; but, as God liveth, I charge you here to-day, before heaven and earth, with being the instigators of the unnumbered ills that now threaten the overthrow of the Republic. I am no alarmist; I make no threats; I have told you what you yourselves do know. I am no disunionist; for its preservation I would imperil my life, my all, save honor. God grant that the Capitol where we stand, the flag that waves above us, without a star effaced, may stand and wave forever. But, if the worst must come, if that terrible hour is at hand, if there is no escape, if the fell calamity of disunion is upon us, pressed on by northern aggression, I want to see my native South plant herself upon the Constitution of the country, raise it before her as her shield, spread it above her as her banner, and, when the contest comes, appealing to the God of battles, let her last son stand and fall, if such be His providence, in defense of their rights and honor.